

# A Textual and Historical Study

OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S  
ACCOUNT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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Despite the preeminent position of Ellen G. White<sup>1</sup> in the theology and history of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and despite the many articles and books that have been written about her, we still know remarkably little about her or her literary work, for the church's scholars have not yet examined closely and systematically her numerous publications. I believe that if we are ever to understand Adventism, as it is today and as it was in the nineteenth century, we must undertake this study, which will surely be of ultimate benefit to the church.

What I propose to do here is to provide, somewhat hesitantly, an example of the method that I think Adventist scholarship might profitably adopt in this examination of Ellen White's writings. I have selected from her book *The Great Controversy* the chapter entitled "The Bible and the French Revolution." I have brought to bear on that chapter the textual and historical evidence available, much in the way that other religious literary documents are studied by Christian critics and historians. Any conclusions that I reach obviously ought to be tested against the other chapters in *The Great Controversy* and against all her other books, which I have deliberately excluded from consideration here.

I do not mean to imply, of course, that I am the first to treat in detail the composition of *The Great Controversy*. But I know of only two essays on the book that are worth serious attention, and both of these, unfortunately, do not ask the questions I propose to consider.

The first essay is a chapter in *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, in which the late Francis D. Nichol attempts to refute the charge of plagiarism in

*The Great Controversy* and *The Acts of the Apostles*.<sup>2</sup> I have no quarrel with Nichol's arguments, though I feel he is on shaky ground when he defends Mrs. White by showing that certain other nineteenth-century Adventist writers also plagiarized extensively. Actually, Nichol seems to me to be beating a dead horse with his usual charming vigor. Plagiarism, at least as restrictively defined by him, is not the real issue in *The Great Controversy*.

The other treatment of the subject which I have found useful is a mimeographed paper entitled "Ellen G. White as an Historian," by Arthur White, secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate. This paper was delivered at the Quadrennial Council on Higher Education at Andrews University in August 1968. Arthur White covers somewhat the same ground I do, and he provides several valuable quotations from unpublished letters by Ellen White and her son. Again, although I seldom disagree with what White says, he largely ignores the issues that interest me.

What historians did Ellen White regard most highly? Do they have in common any particular social or political bias? How careful was she in her use of historical evidence? Did she ever make copying errors in transcribing material from her sources? Is there any particular category of historical information which she consistently ignored? Did she make use of the best scholarship available in her day? What do the revisions in successive editions of *The Great Controversy* reveal about her changing intentions? These are the questions — and not the traditional ones about whether she plagiarized and whether only certain passages are inspired — that ought to receive our attention.<sup>3</sup>

Before I can discuss any of these matters, however, I must trace, as briefly as possible, the genesis and development of the text of *The Great Controversy*, particularly the chapter on the French Revolution.

## I

Ellen White reported having experienced her first supernatural revelation while engaging in morning worship in December 1844. In an account of it published the next year she wrote: "While I was praying at the family altar, the Holy Ghost fell upon me, and I seemed to be rising higher and higher, far above the dark world." She told of being lifted up to heaven, where she saw the sea of glass, the tree of life, and the throne of God.<sup>4</sup> Other visions followed, dealing with biblical history, the rise of Christianity, and future events, particularly the second coming of Christ. In 1858, abandoning her practice of publishing separate reports of the visions, Mrs.

White brought together much of this material in the first volume of *Spiritual Gifts*, which presented a panoramic view of human history from the fall of Adam to the Second Advent. This book constituted the nucleus of what was later to become *The Great Controversy*, but at this point it was a slender volume and contained little historical material except for occasional comments on the motives of important religious figures of the past. There was no mention of the French Revolution.

As the fourth volume of a set published under the general title of *The Spirit of Prophecy, The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan, From the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of the Controversy*, appeared in 1884. The earlier book was considerably amplified, with a few quotations from secular historians (though the sources were not identified). The French Revolution was now treated for the first time in a chapter entitled "The Two Witnesses," which was primarily an exposition of biblical prophecy and made no pretense of dealing adequately with the Revolution. The chapter was five and a half pages long.

The book sold well, especially to non-Adventists, and Ellen White began to lay plans for revising and enlarging it once again. In 1885 she found an opportunity to do so, for she and her son William, having been asked by the church leaders to visit the European missions, moved to the Adventist publishing house in Basel, Switzerland, where she remained until the autumn of 1887. During this period she had access to the library, well stocked with historical works, of the late J. N. Andrews, who had been the first Adventist missionary in Europe until his death in 1883.

When the new edition of *The Great Controversy* was published in 1888, it was liberally sprinkled with long quotations from historians, but again the sources were not identified. "In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted," Mrs. White explained in her preface. "Except in a few instances, no specific credit has been given, since they are not quoted for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject." In 1888 the chapter, now retitled "The Bible and the French Revolution," filled twenty-four pages, and, in addition to biblical prophecies and general moral reflections, it included full descriptions of the persecution of the Albigenses,<sup>5</sup> the St. Bartholomew Massacre, the worship of the "Goddess of Reason," and the Reign of Terror.

Later, in 1911, Mrs. White stated that the major modifications in the

book were the result of new visions. "While writing the manuscript of *Great Controversy* I was often conscious of the presence of the angels of God," she said. "And many times the scenes about which I was writing were presented to me anew in visions of the night, so that they were fresh and vivid in my mind."<sup>6</sup>

The 1888 edition went through numerous printings until, in 1911, when new plates were required, Mrs. White contributed some final revisions. Mainly these were notes identifying the sources of quoted material (though some of the quotations could no longer be traced and thus remained unidentified) and a few corrections of historical facts. The basic structure of the book, however, was not changed from 1888, and this 1911 edition remains the standard text of *The Great Controversy*.

## II

It should be evident from even this sketchy summary of the book's publication history that the most crucial period in its development was 1885-88, during which time it was expanded by nearly a third of its 1884 length through the interpolation of large amounts of historical material, much of it quoted verbatim. Fortunately, at least some of these quotations could still be identified in 1911, and so it is possible for us now to retrace Mrs. White's steps in the revising of "The Bible and the French Revolution" and to examine the sources she used for this particular chapter. The 1911 notes list the following:

- Sir Walter Scott, *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*;<sup>7</sup>
- George R. Gleig, *The Great Collapse*, *Blackwood's Magazine*;<sup>8</sup>
- James A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*;<sup>9</sup>
- L. A. Thiers, *History of the French Revolution*;<sup>10</sup>
- Philippe Buchez and Pierre Roux, *Collection of Parliamentary History*;<sup>11</sup>
- J. H. Merle D'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation in Europe in the Time of Calvin*;<sup>12</sup>
- Guillaume de Felice, *History of the Protestants of France*;<sup>13</sup>
- Henry White, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew*;<sup>14</sup>
- Archibald Alison, *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in M.DCC.LXXXIX to the Restoration of the Bourbons in M.DCCC.XV*.<sup>15</sup>

The question I wish to raise is this: Do these historians have any attitude or bias in common which might explain why Ellen White was attracted to them?

Sir Walter Scott, upon whom, more than any other historian (judging by the frequency and length of the citations), Mrs. White leaned heavily in this chapter, was not primarily a historian, of course, but rather the author of enormously popular historical novels. The biography of Napoleon was

undertaken during the final years of Scott's life in order to offset large debts, and accordingly it was written in great haste and with a minimum of accuracy. In a one-year period Scott was able to produce the massive nine-volume work (printed in small type), thereby earning for himself 18,000 pounds. His secretary, then an inexperienced young man, later described how he and Scott both wrote for twelve hours every day in the latter's library, even eating meals at their desks to save time. Occasionally Scott's writing hand would tire, and he would then dictate rapidly to his companion, hardly interrupting the flow of words as he plucked various books from the shelves.<sup>16</sup>

The resulting biography, marred by both careless research and Scott's strong Tory bias, was very poorly received by reviewers. The *Eclectic Review* observed that Scott had "an extremely superficial knowledge" of his subject and "marks of haste are everywhere manifest" in the book. The *Monthly Review* found it to be "a signal and palpable failure."<sup>17</sup>

Mrs. White's other major source in "The Bible and the French Revolution," James A. Wylie, was a Scottish writer and editor who, in his own words, devoted his life to "the exposure of papal errors and the clear and fervid counter exposition of the principles of the Reformation."<sup>18</sup> Among his other works were *The Papal Hierarchy: An Exposure of the Tactics of Rome for the Overthrow of the Liberty and Christianity of Great Britain* (1878) and *The Jesuits, Their Moral Maxims, and Plots against Kings, Nations and Churches* (1881). If his hatred of the papacy was marked, Wylie's admiration for Protestantism was so pronounced that he could not write on the subject without becoming lyrical. Consider this passage from the first chapter of his first volume of *History of Protestantism*:

Protestantism is not solely the outcome of human progress; it is no mere principle of perfectibility inherent in humanity. . . . Protestantism is a principle which has its origin outside human society; it is a Divine graft on the intellectual and moral nature of man, whereby new vitalities and forces are introduced into it, and the human stem yields henceforth a nobler fruit. It is the descent of a heaven-born influence which allies itself with all the instincts and powers of the individual, with all the laws and cravings of society, and which, quickening both the individual and the social being into new life, and directing their efforts to nobler objects, permits the highest development of which humanity is capable, and the fullest possible accomplishment of all its grand ends. In a word, Protestantism, is revived Christianity [p. 2].

Clearly, here is a man not to be trusted when he describes the Catholic persecution of French Protestants.

George Gleig, the author of the *Blackwood's* article, also possessed a strong conservative bent. His chief contribution to British public life was

an attack on the Reform Bill of 1832, which extended voting privileges to the middle class.<sup>19</sup> (*Blackwood's* itself, incidentally, was one of the leading Tory quarterlies in Britain.) The passage from Gleig's article quoted by Mrs. White (a sweeping moral condemnation of the French people: "France is the only nation in the world concerning which the authentic record survives, that as a nation she lifted her hand in open rebellion against the Author of the universe.") is part of a violently anti-French diatribe. Specifically, Gleig was urging British military or diplomatic intervention against the French on the Continent, and his low opinion of French morals appears to be the natural outgrowth of a firmly held political conviction.

Similarly, Sir Archibald Alison, an uncompromising Scottish Tory who believed in the necessity of Negro slavery, retired from public life in 1830 in order to warn the world through the pages of *Blackwood's* of "the many evils impending from democracy and the Reform Bill."<sup>20</sup> In the preface to his *History of Europe*, a book which Mrs. White quoted twice in "The Bible and the French Revolution," Alison explained his philosophy of history, which accounted for France's turmoil by attributing it to "the consequences of democratic ascendancy." Nevertheless, he said, "the principal actors were overruled by an unseen power" — which means, as *The Dictionary of National Biography* has remarked, that he wished "to prove that Providence was on the side of the Tories."

Another monarchist, antirevolutionary (albeit somewhat more impartial) historian to whom Ellen White turned was Louis Adolphe Thiers, who near the end of his life served as president of the French Republic. "The faults of the book [Thiers' *History of the French Revolution*]," declares G. P. Gooch, "are that its view was external, that its author never realised the importance of obtaining new material, and that it was conceived and executed as an incident in a political campaign."<sup>21</sup>

The other historians quoted by Mrs. White — Buchez, White, D'Aubigné,<sup>22</sup> and de Felice — need not be discussed here, since her citations from their books are brief and primarily factual. The ones mentioned previously are cited at length, and their political, social, and religious attitudes (as revealed in the passages she quoted) seem to receive her approval.

It is significant that to a man they possessed strong antipathies against Catholicism and democracy. All of these historians (with the exception of Gleig, whose article in 1870 is unmistakably an anachronism, and Wylie, who had a special Protestant ax to grind) belong to an earlier "romantic" historical school whose work had been largely discredited by the time Mrs. White was revising *The Great Controversy* in 1885. It is not helpful, there-

fore, to repeat the familiar assertion that she was merely illustrating her generalizations with quotations from the best historical scholarship of her generation. The fact is that she appears not to have been familiar with any of the important work that had been done on the Revolution in the latter half of the century and that she relied instead on older historical treatments that were strong on moral fervor and weak on factual evidence.<sup>23</sup>

### III

On the other hand, it is fruitless to point out the many discrepancies between facts and interpretations in *The Great Controversy* and our present knowledge of the French Revolution, for we cannot demand that Mrs. White should have written in 1888 from the perspective of the late twentieth century. Suffice it to say that if she were writing her book today, her view of French history would probably be considerably less simplistic.<sup>24</sup> But I think it is not unreasonable to ask how accurately and fairly Mrs. White used the materials which were actually available to her in J. N. Andrews' library.

First, there is the old question of plagiarism, which I decline to regard as a major issue (at least in connection with this chapter). I fully agree with Nichol that Mrs. White's unacknowledged borrowings were not done with dishonest intent and probably reflect the looser literary ethics of the nineteenth century. The following is an example of the close paraphrases which one finds occasionally in the chapter:

For seven days the massacre was continued in Paris, the first three with inconceivable fury. And it was not confined to the city itself, but by special order of the king, was extended to all the provinces and towns where Protestants were found.

*Great Controversy* (1911), p. 272.

For seven days the massacres were continued in Paris, and the first three especially with unabating fury. Nor were they confined within the walls of the city. In pursuance of orders sent from the court, they were extended to all provinces and cities where Protestants were found.

Wylie, volume two, p. 604.

However, on the larger question of Mrs. White's intellectual, rather than verbal, indebtedness to her sources, it must be said that she followed them very closely and drew most of her material from only a few pages in each. It is difficult, therefore, to know how to interpret Mrs. White's statement that these scenes are based primarily on visions.

It is true that the early part of the chapter is a discussion of the prophetic significance of the French Revolution and that the final pages offer moral

generalizations on the decline of France. But the central section of "The Bible and the French Revolution," which is entirely historical, I have compared line by line with her sources — where they are known — and I do not find a single detail which is not also present in them. Even her moral perspective is shared by the historians she consulted. Except for a few broad generalizations about the Albigenses, Mrs. White provided no connected historical narrative in 1884; this appeared only after she had been reading in Andrews' library, and then every fact, every observation, came from printed sources. I do not know, of course, whether the same pattern of literary development would hold true for the other historical chapters in *The Great Controversy*.

Another matter which Arthur White has discussed at great length is the factual errors in the 1888 edition that were corrected in 1911. An example which he cites is the statement made in 1888 that the beginning of the St. Bartholomew Massacre was signaled by the tolling of "the great palace bell." It was pointed out to Mrs. White that this was inaccurate, and in 1911 the phrase was changed to "a bell" (p. 272). One must certainly agree with Arthur White that the mistake is a trivial one and not worth becoming agitated about; but his treatment of this particular revision is, in a sense, misleading, because he implies that the change was made as a result of new information on the subject which became available between 1888 and 1911.

In fact, the error was a result of a simple misreading by Mrs. White of her original source before 1888. Wylie (volume two, p. 600), upon whom Mrs. White was drawing at this point in the chapter, wrote that "the signal for the massacre was to be the tolling of the great bell of the Palace of Justice." Two pages later in his book, Wylie explained that in the event it was the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerois which was rung. Obviously Mrs. White had read the first statement but not the second, for she displayed confusion also about the time of night when the bell sounded.

This is not the only instance I have found of carelessness by Mrs. White in transcribing material from her sources. I am not speaking, of course, of minor changes in wording or punctuation, for these are not worth our notice; but obvious inaccuracies of fact, in their cumulative effect, undermine the historical basis of the chapter. In 1888, for example, Mrs. White wrote of "the breviaries of the Old and New Testaments," a statement which was later corrected to read "breviaries, missals, and the Old and New Testaments" (1911 edition, p. 276). This is an error in transcription which would be made by someone unfamiliar with the nature of breviaries.



Most of her errors, however, are in the direction of exaggeration. In 1888 she had spoken of the "millions" who died in the French Revolution; in 1911 this was scaled down to "multitudes" (p. 284). An even more revealing inaccuracy is one which was never corrected. In the sixteenth century, she wrote, "thousands upon thousands of Protestants found safety in flight" from France (1911 edition, p. 278). Then the following paragraph is a lengthy quotation from Wylie. Had she read Wylie more carefully, she would have noticed, immediately preceding the statement which she quoted, this sentence: "Meanwhile another, and yet another, rose up and fled, till the band of self-confessed and self-expatriated disciples of the Gospel swelled to between 400 and 500" (Wylie, volume two, p. 212). Wylie himself is given to hyperbole in discussing Catholic persecutions; and when one compounds his exaggerations with Mrs. White's, the distance from historical reality is very great indeed.<sup>25</sup>

Still another issue that must concern us is whether Mrs. White consistently omitted or suppressed certain kinds of evidence which she found in her sources. She stated repeatedly, of course, that she was not writing balanced history but only a theological interpretation of history. So it should hardly surprise us that she treated the French Revolution entirely from a religious standpoint; she did not take into account any political, social, or economic forces operating in the Old Regime. It might be pointed out that such a vision of history is as incomplete, in its own way, as a complete denial of the importance of religious and moral factors in human affairs would be. However, I am not competent to enter into a general discussion of Mrs. White's theory of history, and therefore I will restrict my remarks to two specific cases in "The Bible and the French Revolution" in which I find significant omissions, the effect of both being to exaggerate the role of Catholic clergymen in the attack on religious institutions and ideals.

To give a striking example of the irreligious spirit of the Revolution, Mrs. White quoted a blasphemous remark by a person she called "one of the priests of the new order." The clear implication is that this individual is one of the "apostate priests" to whom she had referred earlier on the same page. Yet Alison (volume two, p. 90), from whom she borrowed this anecdote, merely identified the speaker as "the comedian Monort." A cleric he was not, except perhaps in some extravagantly metaphorical sense.

Another story, which she found in Scott, was altered basically in its significance by a similar omission of an important detail. The Scott quotation as printed in *The Great Controversy* (1911 edition, p. 274) is as follows:

[The] constitutional bishop of Paris was brought forward to play the principal part in the most impudent and scandalous farce ever acted in the face of a national representation. . . . He was brought forward in full procession, to declare to the Convention that the religion which he had taught so many years was, in every respect, a piece of priestcraft, which had no foundation either in history or sacred truth. He disowned, in solemn and specific terms, the existence of the Deity to whose worship he had been consecrated, and devoted himself in the future to the homage of liberty, equality, virtue, and morality. He then laid on the table his episcopal decorations, and received a fraternal embrace from the president of the Convention. Several apostate priests followed the example of this prelate.

And here are the sentences deleted by Mrs. White: "It is said that the leaders of the scene had some difficulty in inducing the bishop to comply with the task assigned him, which, after all, he executed, not without present tears and subsequent remorse. But he did play the part prescribed" (volume one, p. 172). Certainly our attitude toward the bishop is transformed by the knowledge that he performed the act under duress and wept as he did it; yet Mrs. White, probably because she wished to underline the apostasy of the Catholic Church, did not reveal these crucial facts to us.

#### IV

I am sure that I do not understand all the implications of the evidence which has come to light in this study of a chapter in *The Great Controversy*. For my part, I will hazard only a few cautiously phrased conclusions and leave the larger issues to the theologians.

*First*, it was not mere modesty that led Mrs. White to disclaim any credentials as a historian; we must take her at her word in this matter.<sup>26</sup> To treat *The Great Controversy* as history is to ignore the book's fundamentally theological character.

*Second*, the traditional Adventist understanding of the nature of her inspiration does not adequately explain the processes we have seen at work in this chapter. It simply will not suffice to say that God showed her the broad outline of events and she then filled in the gaps with her readings. In the case of the French Revolution, there was no "broad outline" until she had read the historians.

*Third*, I hope that this study has demonstrated the great need in our church for a serious, concerted reexamination of the writings of Ellen G. White. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in a scholarly sense, we know next to nothing about her books. More than fifty years have passed since her death. Surely it is time for us to recognize that the author of the books we have all read since childhood was a very human, godly woman who lived in a particular age and interpreted history with a particular set of assump-

tions. She did not, one must conclude, escape the intellectual influences and limitations that are experienced by every man and woman. But these are part of what it means to be a human being. And one suspects that most Seventh-day Adventists could more readily respect and understand a fallible, imperfect Ellen White than the superhuman saint that the church has often given them in the past.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 An extended treatment of Ellen G. White's career would be outside the scope of this article. There is no adequate biography of her; but see *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1915), based primarily on her autobiographical writings.
- 2 Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1951), pp. 403-428. His two following chapters also take up other aspects of the "plagiarism" issue.
- 3 There are other potentially useful lines of inquiry that I have been unable to pursue: (1) a comparison of the manuscript drafts and the proofs of *The Great Controversy* (the White Estate may well possess these); (2) an examination of Mrs. White's diaries and correspondence during the periods when she was writing and revising the book (this material is also owned by the White Estate); and (3) an exhaustive study of the diaries, correspondence, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies of Mrs. White's acquaintances.
- 4 Reprinted in *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1945), pp. 14-20.
- 5 Mrs. White's glorification of the Albigenses is puzzling. They abolished the sacrament of marriage, rejected the divinity of Christ, and had little in common with the Waldenses (with whom she invariably compares them) except that both groups were persecuted religious minorities. See John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper 1874), volume one, p. 133: "That the Albigenses were identical with the Waldenses has been maintained by two very different schools of theologians for precisely opposite reasons: by the Romanists, to make the Waldenses responsible for the errors of the Albigenses, and by a number of respectable Protestant writers (e.g., Allix) to show that the Albigenses were entirely free from the errors charged against them by their Romish persecutors." (I have deliberately quoted from a well known Protestant religious encyclopedia which was available during Mrs. White's lifetime.)
- 6 Quoted in Arthur White, *Ellen G. White as an Historian* (unpublished manuscript), p. 10.
- 7 Sir Walter Scott, *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, two volumes (Philadelphia: J. and J. L. Gihon 1858). The bibliography of *The Great Controversy* cites an 1854 edition of the book which I cannot find in either the *Library of Congress Catalog of Printed Cards* or the *British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books*.
- 8 George R. Gleig, *The Great Collapse*, *Blackwood's Magazine* 108, 641-656 (November 1870). Like most nineteenth-century British journalism, Gleig's article was published anonymously but is attributed to him by Walter E. Hough-

- ton, editor, *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* (University of Toronto Press 1966), p. 133.
- 9 James A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, three volumes (London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin 1874-77).
  - 10 L. A. Thiers, *History of the French Revolution*, two volumes; G. T. Fisher, translator (London: C. Daly 1846). Wrongly given in *The Great Controversy* as "M. A. Thiers."
  - 11 Philippe Buchez and Pierre Roux, *Collection of Parliamentary History*. A forty-volume work published in Paris in 1834-38. I can find no information about the English translation which Mrs. White evidently used.
  - 12 J. H. Merle D'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation in Europe in the Time of Calvin*, eight volumes (London: Longmans 1863-78).
  - 13 Guillaume de Felice, *History of the Protestants of France*; P. E. Barnes, translator (London 1853).
  - 14 Henry White, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew* (New York: Harper 1871).
  - 15 Archibald Alison, *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in M.DCC.LXXXIX to the Restoration of the Bourbons in M.DCCC.XV*; second edition, five volumes (Edinburgh: Blackwood 1835-36).
  - 16 J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard 1838), volume two, pp. 573-574.
  - 17 For a list and summaries of contemporary reviews, see James C. Corson, *A Bibliography of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd 1943), pp. 282-283.
  - 18 *The Dictionary of National Biography*, volume twenty-one, p. 1152.
  - 19 *Ibid.*, volume seven, pp. 1303-1304.
  - 20 *Ibid.*, volume one, pp. 287-290.
  - 21 G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green 1913), p. 201.
  - 22 D'Aubigné was Mrs. White's favorite historian and is quoted frequently in *The Great Controversy* chapters treating the Reformation.
  - 23 For a survey of nineteenth-century studies of the French Revolution, see Gooch, pp. 226-254; for a bibliography, see James W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing* (New York: Macmillan 1942), volume two, p. 227n.
  - 24 One of the most important of modern works on the subject is that of Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*; R. R. Palmer, translator (Princeton University Press 1947).
  - 25 This particular error by Mrs. White is an interesting one, because it is possible to reconstruct how she misread Wylie. Wylie cites the 400 or 500 "self-expatriated disciples of the Gospel" and then goes on to assert: "The men who were now fleeing from France were the first to tread a path which was to be trodden again and again by hundreds of thousands of their countrymen in years to come. During the following two centuries and [a] half these scenes were renewed at short intervals." Mrs. White reduces all of this information to one sentence and thereby distorts it: "Thousands upon thousands found safety in flight; and this continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation." In other words, Mrs. White removes Wylie's "hundreds of thousands" of Protestant exiles from "the following two centuries and [a] half" and instead places this enormous group in the sixteenth century.

- 26 In a letter officially approved by Mrs. White, her son wrote: "Mother has never claimed to be an authority on history. The things which she has written out, are descriptions of flash-light pictures and other representations given her regarding the actions of men, and the influence of these actions upon the work of God for the salvation of men, with views of past, present, and future history in its relation to this work. In connection with the writing out of these views, she has made use of good and clear historical statements to help make plain to the reader the things which she is endeavoring to present." (Arthur White, Ellen G. White as an Historian, appendix, p. 4.)

## The "Spirit of Prophecy"

RICHARD B. LEWIS

While I was a book editor at the Pacific Press, I eliminated from manuscripts the expression *Spirit of Prophecy* as applied to Ellen G. White or to her writings, and I continue to refrain from this usage in all personal discourse. Here are the reasons.

The expression commonly used to mean the writings of Ellen White, as in "We study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy," is a logical anomaly in that the words for cause or source are used for the result. That is, the Spirit of Prophecy, the Holy Spirit, which inspires prophetic utterance, is not the *books*; it is the cause or source of the books. At times we err in associating the expression with Ellen White as a *person*. Obviously Ellen White was not the Spirit of Prophecy but was inspired by it.

Again, the expression "Bible and writings of the Spirit of Prophecy" is ambiguous and confusing, because the Spirit of Prophecy, the Holy Spirit which inspires the prophet, did not confine this animation to Ellen White alone but included Moses, Malachi, John, and all the rest. Thus, the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy include the Bible *and* the works of Ellen White — in short, the literary products of all inspired writers.

If we are after precision of expression, we must use the term Spirit of Prophecy to refer to the Holy Spirit or, by a sort of metonymy, to the Spirit-